

# Creating more diversity in oil and gas

WPC interview with Amina Benkhadra, General Director, National Office of Hydrocarbons & Mines, Morocco  
 Maria Moræus Hanssen, CEO & Chairman of the Management Board, DEA Deutsche Erdoel AG, Germany  
 and Joanna Desjardins, Vice President, Diversity, Inclusion & Youth, WPC, Canada



**The WPC's "Untapped Reserves" study in conjunction with the Boston Consulting Group found that the share of women in the oil and gas industry currently stands at 22 per cent, one of the lowest percentages in any industry sector. What can the industry do to attract and create a more diverse work force?**

*Maria Moræus Hanssen (MMH):* First, companies need to decide on the importance of this topic and need to develop a real will to do something about it. In order to get more women into the industry and to the top of the industry there are some key aspects to consider. Currently, career development in most companies follows an extremely conservative and complicated promotion scheme. We need to recruit and promote differently. We, as executive managers have to lead by example and dare to try out different schemes.

Above that – and in general for all talents – we as an industry have to demonstrate the importance of oil and gas. We need to raise a desire to work with us.

*Amina Benkhadra (AB):* The oil industry is without any doubt a male dominated environment, but the industry perception on gender diversity is changing for the better. Oil and gas companies can play a greater role in encouraging more women to join the sector. Some actions that can be implemented are:

- Start early: While not essential to study STEM subjects to reach the board in oil, there is still the need to attract young women into technical and operational career paths.
- Increase collaboration between oil and gas companies and schools: More networking and mentoring programmes, increasing the visibility of strong female role models who can share their views of the benefits of joining the oil and gas industry (e.g. the variety of experiences, travel and good pay), could all make a huge difference.
- Increase Sponsorship: Helping high potential women to identify sponsors who will play an active role in career development – research has shown that men are 46 per cent more likely than women to have a sponsor.
- Implementation of quotas: to increase the proportion of women on company boards in every sector, from quotas to voluntary targets

Attracting more women into the oil and gas sector will take time and requires effort at all levels – in schools and universities, and within the sector itself.

*Joanna Desjardins (JD):* Promote a culture of being inclusive from the top down and actively promote diverse talent to model opportunities and expectations to younger staff. Create flexible work environments and be consistent with merit promoting

(not just to those who ask or are 'popular'). Finally, allow opportunities for 'diverse networking' as not all connections and networks are built the same way.

**From your experience, what do you see as the main challenges for women moving up the career ladder, and how can these be overcome?**

*AB:* I think there are many challenges:

The first challenge is the lack of qualified candidates: The need for technical skills in oil and gas sector jobs, combined with women's smaller presence in STEM disciplines is a key reason for the lack of women in oil and gas.

The second challenge is the access to top management for women. Indeed, although men and women start out on an equal footing, women rarely reach the top of the organisation. Among women who are still at the company after 15 to 20 years, the probability of becoming a senior executive is small, less than 20 per cent.

The third challenge and maybe the most important one is the negative perception. There are negative perceptions of the industry commonly held by women: that it is male dominated, involves excessive compulsory travel to remote or challenging locations, requires hard physical labour and a background in STEM. Women also often lack confidence in themselves.

*MMH:* Employers actively need to neutralise natural differences between genders in the workplace and offer equal opportunities. There are some good examples around, e.g. extended maternity leave for employees becoming parents when shared between the two partners. Because gender equality in business life only works when you have gender equality in the families.

Likewise, working part-time while you have small children should not automatically fall on mothers. It may be a good solution for the family but I believe part time work should be shared between parents. I personally believe it is difficult to aspire for leadership positions if you work part time for a long period, while your peers are fully committed, gain a lot of experience and demonstrate strong ambition.

*JD:* Plain and simple: women network and communicate differently, and because the leadership is mostly male, that predefined model is hard to break into. Leadership needs to actively seek diverse candidates for succession, at every level, as we tend to only notice and look for qualities that we have in common. If we are intending to be 'diverse', expect those commonalities to be muted. Thus diversity needs to be a conscious effort.



Amina Benkhadra



Maria Moræus Hanssen



Joanna Desjardins



### Were there any key early events that helped shape your own careers?

**AB:** Two important factors should be highlighted: The first concerns men's perception of women in these professions (as engineers or senior executives in the energy field) and that women will not be up to the jobs. The second concerns the support that the hierarchy can provide at the highest level and the trust in their female employees.

I have faced several challenges during my career, but each of them has only strengthened me as the person I am today. This has taught me three things:

- The passion that guides us is the best ally to advance
- Learning is for your entire life (we keep learning)
- The human aspect and its importance in any organisation

**JD:** Curiosity in other people's areas, wide networks, and great sponsors. Not just good sponsors, GREAT sponsors. All my opportunities were a result of someone pulling me up as I climbed.

**MMH:** I had the advantage of growing up in Norway where working in a male-dominated industry did not become a significant disadvantage for me and where I had strong role models, for example my mother with her own career as a CEO. Also, I have a group of close friends, male and female, who all have career ambitions. I have two children. For both of them I went on maternity leaves of approximately 6 months. I did not hold on to my exact positions when I left and when I returned I got new positions, de facto being promoted both times. During the maternity leaves, I maintained a close relationship with the company, the teams and my boss and I also engaged in professional tasks such as attending meetings and conferences. Employees and companies should see maternity leaves as opportunities for job rotations. On the other hand: I cannot encourage employees enough to take time off for the family. We should all ask our male employees, "Why on earth are you here when you just became a parent?" or "Why are you not home with your family?" when the weekend approaches or during the first days at school.

### What do you see as the key positive business impacts for companies by engaging more women in the sector?

**JD:** Women tend to be win-win negotiators, and today, when geopolitics, community relations, regulation and competition are driving every step of this industry, the altruistic approach seems more and more prevalent with industry converging around this change of thought process. Women have a natural tendency for this behaviour and I believe it's an opportune time for us.

**AB:** As women, we have to show that we are not only equal but that we can surpass the limits set. We must always try to turn constraints into opportunities.

Some people may have doubts about a woman's abilities in a rather male technical sector, but commitment and work have shown the capacity of women in all sectors.

**MMH:** We, as an industry, would benefit if we could tap into the whole talent pool and represent the whole society in our work force, which to me is a moral responsibility. It would also support a shift of perception of oil and gas as an "old fashioned dirty" industry to a more modern one.

### What advice would you give young people – men and women – in oil and gas on the best way to get to the top of their profession?

**JD:** Be fair, not 'nice'. This goes both ways in that you should not promote based on favor or nicety, and others will not feel that non-promotion is 'not nice', so long as fairness was the clear goal. Always treat your people and your decisions with fairness in mind. Leading this way naturally invites diversity.

**MMH:** Do not worry about promotion and advancement at the beginning of your career. Show a bit of patience. Get as much experience and exposure as possible. Be interested. Say yes to new tasks, contribute actively with your knowledge and your energy but also bring your heart to work. On a personal level, you should always try to be a nice colleague. You should aim to be a colleague others like to have on their team. Develop a genuine interest and try to understand the importance of the industry. To sum up: When building your own brand: be interested and be positive!

**AB:** The oil and gas industry is an attractive and interesting sector. Petroleum is a rewarding industry with huge growth potential and demand for a new wave of talent. This presents a unique opportunity for recent graduates and young professionals interested in hatching their oil and gas careers.

My advice to young people is: Passion is energy! Passion makes you hungry for knowledge, and knowledge strengthens your confidence! And of course sell yourself! Brush up your CV. Ideally shape it to a specific application, ensuring that you keep it concise and focused on the key points. Make sure you include all relevant skills and experience. Start networking, pay attention to your profile, follow relevant industry news as well as influencers to help develop your market knowledge, and attend industry events to grow your circle of contacts.

View our full report at [www.world-petroleum.org/diversity](http://www.world-petroleum.org/diversity)